

Mr. Ford's Page

WE ARE on the very threshold of a new age. The dates are unimportant, for in the advance of the plan of the ages it is not the sharp-cut dates, but periods of time, that are important. Old things pass away in a fading-out process; new things gradually dawn. Only on looking backward do the people usually realize that "a great thing took place back there." Surprisingly few of the real turning points of the world come amid signs and wonders and people standing in awe of what is passing. In the minds of most, the War was the cataclysm, because it was noisy; but something greater than the War, though much less clamorous, is in passage now.

It is neither for man to help or hinder, but hold himself ready to do what is right, whatever may be the circumstances. When the age begins to turn, we are too late to stop it, for the causes thereof were set in motion long ago and are now invincible. Nor can we help the new age be born, because we are but creatures of months, and the new age is generations in process of formation. We can but will the Right, not for our particular race or religion or nationality, but the Universal Right, which harms none, and in which each finds its own fulfillment.

One of the principal human duties that devolve during periods of change is the duty of conscious allegiance. What do you, as a personality and in your personality, stand for? And are you standing for it by standing with others who are standing for it? These are questions which are pressing home from many directions today. The bugles of Time are blowing "Assembly" and men are dividing themselves, each according to the moral note within.

It is not a question of allegiance to opinions or programs or philosophies; it is a question of allegiance to moralities. A man may be hopelessly wrong in all his opinion, but if he is morally right, he is of the stuff of the continuing order of life. On the other hand a man may be perfectly correct in his opinions and knowledge, and yet everything he does may collapse and die because of moral anemia. In this time of change it is not a question of having the correct economic theory, it is a question of being loyal to the Right. Immoral or unmoral men never yet constructed an enduring social structure, nor enforced a single beneficial social change.

This coming to conscious allegiance is not always a pleasant experience. Especially in this day when everybody is obsessed more or less with the idea of wanting to be a "good fellow," and when the flabby philosophy of "Boost" has reduced us to spongy masses of saccharine sweetness.

Men have been taught to put even their moral convictions in the background, indeed to possess no obtrusive moral convictions, in order that a false show of fellowship may be made.

This fellowship has now fallen apart. It was based on nothing enduring. It had no meaning except a desire to escape the penalty for being "different," which so many people fear.

It is a time now when conscious allegiance costs something, for it will mean division, and the very first division must be between those who will be loyal to moral conviction and those who will not. And this, quite apart from the consideration of persons or majorities.

The country has had considerable experience lately in the lining up of majorities on questions like Peace and Temperance, and because the majority of the people always believe, as a matter of principle, in Peace and Temperance, it has been made to appear that moral allegiance is always just that easy. It is not. The line-up, impressive as it was, has brought us neither Peace nor Temperance; and no such easy, popular line-up ever will.

The majority of the people are naturally straddlers. They are

not in the world to pioneer but to be as happy as possible. If pioneering in a cause brings discomfort, they would rather not. If Truth and Error meet in combat before their gaze, they would rather wait and see which proves the stronger. They may have a lazy faith that Truth at last will win, but it may not be the time as yet, and they do not wish to lend a premature support.

And yet majorities are essential, not to the truth, but to the acknowledgment of the truth; and minorities are essential to the fructifying of majorities. The majority is the sodden dough, the minority the yeast; it is the yeast that changes the character of the dough to something better. Majorities are the position to be taken, as it were; and sometimes Truth takes it, and sometimes Error.

The natural tendency to straddling inheres in most people, and the exceptions to this tendency are not always praiseworthy. There are those who are merely contrary, because they like it; others are contrary because moral allegiance compels them. The majority wants to know if this thing cannot be amicably settled.

No! It cannot be settled. There are some opposites in the world that shall never be reconciled. There are some programs that shall never be harmonized. There are some wars which must continue until one side is exterminated. And that is what frightens some people. They want to be happy; they want to live and let live; they do not want to be bothered. They want leave to enjoy the world as it is, and if there are those who would improve the world, let them do so, but not in a way that interferes with the present schedule.

It is not hard or hardened men that the world needs, but men of moral hardness who possess spiritual backbones. Men to whom the palliative "perhaps" comes too easily, who are so impressed with the idea of "relativity" that they seek refuge in a near-vacuum, are men who are lacking in moral gristle. An Idea may be very valuable to them, but they are of no value to the Idea. And the world advances only as Ideas gather believing men about them.

It is a time of taking sides. There is a growing pressure to that end. Whether men desire it or not, the time is rapidly approaching when they will be counted on one side or another. In this country, at least, it may be expected that the majority will finally line up on the right side, but it will be an impressed majority—impressed by the force without in alliance with the still small voice within.

To take sides is not to exhibit prejudice. That is where many people mistake.

The men who are freest from any taint of prejudice are those who have taken sides with their convictions, and stand there as sentinels and defenders.

If you want to know where the prejudice in the world lurks, look where there is no taking of sides, where everybody is trying to pretend that there is nothing to take sides about. That is where you will find most of the world's prejudice.

A man who has taken sides is thereby freed from prejudice. His step is open, frank, straightforward. His energies are free to flow naturally. But a man who fears to take a side finds prejudice grow within him like a cancer; it grows from the irritation of an unexpressed antagonism in conflict with an unexpressed allegiance. It is suppression.

However, the movement has set in, and will be complete before the old era completely passes and the new begins. Everyone will have to take his own side. It is not too early now for everyone to begin to ponder on which side he really belongs, and whether, morally belonging to that side, he has the moral hardihood to give that side what belongs to it.

THE time is coming when everybody will have to take sides. Even those who thus far have never stood for anything in particular will have to stand by something in particular. The days of flabby straddling, pretending that there are no differences or divisions, belong to the old era, and the new era will be ushered in with a new consciousness of allegiance. In the last analysis there are only two families on the earth, and every subdivision which has been made relates to one family or the other. The man who is afraid to line up, is not a free man. The times are coming when it will not be within his own choice: he will be forced by the very pressure of circumstances to take his stand by the principles to which he belongs.